Four Quarters

Volume 34
Number 3 *Four Quarters: Spring/Summer 1985 Vol. 34, No. 3/4*

Article 1

1985

Four Quarters: Spring 1985 Vol. 34, No. 3/4

Four Quarters

VOL. 34
NOs. 3/4
SPRING/SUMMER 1985
TWO DOLLARS

Four Quarters

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY THE FACULTY OF LA SALLE UNIVERSITY
PHILA., PA 19141

VOL. 34, Nos. 3 & 4 SPRING/SUMMER 1985

Cover: Gloria Bacsujlaky, "Helen," Lithograph. Thanks to James Lang and the La Salle University Print Workshop.

Four Quarters (ISSN-0015-9107) is published quarterly in Autumn, Winter, Spring, Summer by the faculty of La Salle University, 20th & Olney Aves., Phila., Pa. 19141. Subscriptions: $8.00 annually, $13.00 for two years.

Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope. Available in Microform from Xerox University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106. Indexed in American Humanities Index and Index of American Periodical Verse. Second class postage paid at Philadelphia, Pa.

Notice

This double issue, which will complete the current volume number, will be the last issue of *Four Quarters* in its original format.

Starting in the Fall of 1986, the magazine, under the same name, will become largely a magazine of contemporary culture, under the editorship of John J. Keenan, with the collaboration of an editorial board. While it will still feature some fiction and poetry, the magazine will offer a wider range of nonfiction departments. It will appear twice a year. Manuscripts will largely be solicited.

We sincerely regret the inconveniences that our subscribers, contributors, and readers have been subjected to as a result of this change in direction and policy.

Seasons

EMILIE BABCOX

Ladies, your gimcrack
attrac-
tions attract me as much as
your finer points.
Spring, I like your sloppy swell
as well
as your most tender tiny
buds alert to slightest blush of sun.
Sister, you're a peach.
And goodwife summer,
when you pour your swag about,
well, it's as good as your most elegant slip,
slip of sober cloudless well-tuned days.
A classy dame.
Autumn has a pen name under which
to publish her more popular stuff.
As Fall she scatters the gaudy
banners of her passion with abandon.
Indian corn! Sugar maple! Squash!
Yet Autumn speaks also a series of sonnets,
dark and strong and fine
enough to make one hang her head and grieve.
Madam, I applaud.
Winter, you have been much maligned,
called a pinching frigid bitch
who only likes to nip.
But I have liked your sting.
I also like your cool and holy dress,
the brooding room, the empty womb.

Ladies, friends and sisters,
may I often celebrate
your panoply of mulierity,
your lovely selves.

Sounds of the Rude World

JEANNE SCHINTO

"FLOOD IN INDIA. GOOD," Abdul said as Anna guided her bike into the office. He was reading a newspaper headline to himself and eating a hamburger for breakfast. Both chubby brown hands held it up to his purplish lips like a religious offering. He sat near the door at a low, gray metal desk that was piled with papers and looked too small for him. His soft, round knees must have hit its underside. Abdul was the bookkeeper as well as receptionist at *Model Aviation*, but his frequently stated ambition was to become a U.S. government accountant. Three nights a week he attended the Benjamin Franklin School of Accounting on K Street, a few short blocks away.

Anna parked her bike against the wall behind him, on which there was a huge framed poster of a man hang-gliding out across a placid sea. The photo was a blow-up of a miniature, and the man was made of plastic.

"Pakistanis hate Indians," Abdul instructed Anna. She seemed to need a lot of instruction. If he had met her on a dusty street at home, he would have pegged her as a lost one, but at least she had the gift of knowing she was lost. Some were lost and did not know it. They didn't bother to go looking. Unfortunate. On the other hand, Abdul himself no longer searched. He hoped to become a practical man, an American.

"Why do you hate them, Abdul?"

"We hate each other," Abdul smiled.

Anna shrugged, took a hairbrush from her knapsack, and began to brush her dark veils of hair. Her desk was in a tiny office off the reception area, but she liked to spend a little time each morning with Abdul. He was peculiar, but so far he was her only friend here.

She stood behind his chair and read the paper over his shoulder. She gasped, pointing to what caught her eye: an obituary on the front page. Someone famous had died. "Oh, no! I loved him!" She held her hands in the prayer position under her startled eyes and read a brief caption under the photo praising a long life well-spent.

"He made cars?" Abdul looked puzzled and not altogether approving of the fuss.

"No, *mobiles!*"

"Oh, I know what they are. Machines."

"They aren't machines."

"They are mechanical, mathematical. I know how they work."

Anna said nothing more about it, but asked to borrow the section of the paper that carried related stories and reminiscences. In her office she would read each detail of the artist's life, trying each on for size, like coats on a rack in a store. It was impossible that all the facts would fit, but Anna always hoped that they would. It would be useful if she stayed with studying acting.

He handed her the section of the newspaper.

"How did you do on your accounting test, Abdul?"

"Got B!" he told her proudly, as if there were no grade higher. He wiped his mouth with a folded handkerchief, having finished his hamburger in many small swift bites. "And how is your jumping going on?"

Every night for a week Anna had been playing Tosca at the Opera House. ("For 30 seconds, so don't bother coming," she had told him when he had expressed some interest; anyway, she couldn't get anyone free tickets.) For $25 a performance. Padded to look twice her size, she leapt from the parapet of the bridge at Castel Sant' Angelo to her death below.

"Tonight's my last night to do it. I'll miss it."

"You don't get hurt at all?"

"A little. I do have a few black-and-blue marks," she said with both hands busy making a braid.

"And some day you will jump and sing both?"

"Oh, no! Not me. I don't want to sing! Unless I have to, to get a role or something."

"I like you, Anna," Abdul said in a confiding tone, as if he were admitting to a fault. "But I worry for you. I wish you luck. The kind of success you're after is very, very hard to obtain."

"But it's not the success. It's the doing. There's something about it that makes me feel like a real person, not just a mess of little details ready to explode."

Abdul held up one creased finger, by way of telling her it was his turn to speak. He got his wallet out and showed her a photo of a little girl, cupping it in the palm of his hand like a charm. "My wife works washing other people's hair, you know. She makes $4,000 a year plus tips. We have this child five years old, still in Pakistan, living with my wife's parents. And until my wife and I earn enough to send for her, in Pakistan is where she will stay. We, *we,* have exploded in a thousand directions!"

"I'm sorry, Abdul, I didn't know."

"That's why I tell you."

"I'm just sorry," she repeated as ineffectively as before.

Facts, no more, no less, Abdul seemed to say by his steady, grimacing gaze. With the same fixed expression, he changed the subject: "Ramadan is coming," and he would have to fast. He would have to get up in the middle of the night and eat a meal of fried bread. And he was somehow gleeful in his prouncement, so sure was he of the ways that the universe chooses to work, even in Washington, D.C.: so proud, but pretending to be annoyed by the demands it places on the faithful. She felt surprised by how much she liked him. And Abdul, with his heavy black eyebrows evenly drawn over dark, watchful eyes, observed her freely, unabashedly as she got her messages out of her mailbox. The ways of Americans which appealed to him, he adopted; others, not. Hamburgers, yes, religion no. Thanksgiving turkey, never, he smiled. And his lips were very wet, slightly opened—he used a great deal of saliva when he spoke, as if he meant to say much more, then stopped himself.

THE LIGHTS OF ALEX'S TAPE RECORDER danced, obeying his music. The room was lit up as if for surgery. Very important work going on here, the lights said. Some people of influence agreed. And his parents' money did buy him a New York debut at Carnegie Hall last year:

> *Alexander Longley, a pianist and composer, whose interesting background includes studying to be an engineer and a fling as a rock musician, last night displayed the willingness and digital ability to investigate composers as diverse as Scarlatti and Alkan. His own compositions, "In a Small Plane, Flying" and "Suite: Anna," were agreeably buoyant. . . .*

Alex made strange breathing noises when he practiced. He was aware of nothing outside the music. His beard at midnight often would still be matted from sleep of the night before, but his nails were always perfectly trimmed, his hands pure white and womanly smooth. He used a potholder to lift even a tepid coffee pot to fill his cup.

At the coffee machine Anna poured herself a cup and looked at the bitten nails of one of her hands. She never had learned to take care of them properly. Wasn't a bride-to-be supposed to grow her nails, outgrow childish habits? A bandaid was wrapped too tightly around her thumb: just this morning she had cut herself slicing a piece of bread. A dot of blood was on her sleeve. She rolled the cuff and headed towards her office with her steaming coffee.

In the hallway Anna met up with Harold, the business manager, who gave her a lecherous grin. Too lecherous, the forced grin of

impotence, Anna had decided early on. *Heterosexual panic* came to mind today. She had learned the term the other night, reading idly in a book about psychiatry she found in one of the bookcases at Alex's parents' house. Alex's parents had moved to Florida. Alex stayed in their house rent-free. And so had Anna up until three weeks ago. He had three pianos all in one room, two grands facing one another, and an upright against the wall. Piano books, record albums, and tapes were piled everywhere, shelves of them sagging with the weight. Once Anna herself had studied to be a pianist, practiced all day, wrapped the sounding board with a blanket, so she wouldn't disturb her neighbors. Gave herself a two-cookie reward every hour.

It came to nothing.

"How are you, Harold?" Anna asked without looking at him. She already knew what he looked like with his pants hiked up too high, his alcoholic slenderness.

"In what respect?" Harold replied, laughing through his nose.

Sometimes, when his eye caught hers, he quickly made his lips form a kiss. "Think I'll turn queer and blow this place," he said every evening to Anna, poking his white crewcut into her office as he prepared to go home. Anna laughed the first few times, out of a nervous politeness. Now she knew better. But Harold wasn't discouraged. And neither was she. She had a little notebook, lined and spiral-bound, into which she had written the yearly salary she had been promised, dividing it into monthly, weekly, daily, and hourly portions. Looked at from those perspectives, the money didn't seem like such a huge amount; but it allowed her the freedom to be on her own for awhile. Now if only she could do what she had set out to do: become someone.

"Are we going to see you on Johnny Carson one of these nights soon?" Harold asked.

"Not too soon."

"Why not? You're going to be famous, aren't you? Can I have your autograph?"

She knew he meant well, but it was hopeless. Finally she smiled. That seemed to be all he wanted of her this morning. He pinched her arm, then weaved down the hallway.

He was a former military man and somehow gave the impression that he was still in uniform; probably his posture did it. Anna had been led to believe, when she was a child, that to succeed in life all one needed was to hold one's spine straight. But here was proof of the opposite. Harold's wife had committed suicide a few years ago, Abdul had told Anna. He'd never remarried, and his drinking seemed to worsen daily. This explained him, made it easier for Anna to accept the sloppiness with which he handled life. Abdul had not only accepted it, but had worked it to his own advantage. He suggested Anna do the same. The time to ask Harold for a raise, Abdul told her, was after he

had been to lunch.

Passing through reception again, Anna saw that Joan had arrived. The secretary to the publisher, Joan sat at the desk next to Abdul's hunched over an enormous black pocketbook. Anna carried her coffee past her, saying good-morning but not stopping to chat. Conversation flowed unnaturally between them. She kept going down the glaring orange carpet to the safety of her office.

"Annaaa," Joan sang playfully after her, "Momma's got a surprise for you."

Anna was wearing her new green fake velvet jeans with the rhinestones on the pockets. Turning to face Joan, Anna suddenly felt foolish in them—Joan was staring. Anna smiled quizzically. She was a little afraid of Joan. "Hi. What?"

Joan slowly rose from her seat to reveal the same star-studded tops of her own green fake velvet jeans pockets.

"Oh, no!" Anna laughed; they both did. And each said yes, yes, a good buy—on sale—at Garfinkel's. But at the same time the coolness came. Anna had understood from the beginning that the two would be civil enough to each other. but never friends.

Joan's face was rockhard, with sharpened features, even as it laughed. She made the fake velvet and the rhinestones look, not lighthearted, the way Anna made them look, but garish, cheap, like an off-color story told by a woman about a woman. Joan paraded around in front of her desk, striking poses.

She looked as if nothing could harm her. Studying her, Anna had the chilling idea that she was foolish to believe that she could ever be up on a stage. She did better at hiding. Joan could probably get up on a stage with ease if she wanted to and take what would come and give a handful of something back, maybe, right in the teeth of the audience. And Alex was made sturdy enough for the stage, too. He would be the pianist of the family—if they ever did get married. He would sit at strange pianos, face the sea of glinting eyeglasses waiting, blinking, coughing.

"Aren't you committing suicide nightly for money?" Joan asked in her husky voice, so certain of itself.

"Just one more time left: tonight."

"Doesn't it make you feel creepy?"

"Yes, but is also makes you feel more alive afterwards. It makes you want to live your life and a few other lives, too, if possible. It makes you think: 'Now last night, that could have been it,' and I wouldn't have seen this day and the fact that you bought my same pants. That's worth living another day for, I guess."

"You don't sound totally convinced."

"I don't? Well, I am. I think I am."

But Joan had finished listening.

ABDUL WAS TELLING someone on the phone that on his tax returns he always put down $200 in charitable contributions even though he never contributed anything to anyone. "They don't check," he explained to his friend, "unless it's *under* $200."

All day Anna heard Abdul on the phone, talking to his friends. She didn't mind. She liked to listen. It seemed to be a lucky mistake that she had this office, this job as editorial assistant at all. She did know something about grammar, punctuation, consistency. Once she had been quite serious about writing poetry, and that helped. Anyway, she could do the work, which was mostly looking for other people's errors. She had been given a long strip of copy to proofread at her interview and had found every mistake, aided by the fact that she knew the terminology: Alex's hobby was flying real planes.

She turned to her work, today's strips of typeset copy waiting to be read word by word, letter by letter until their meanings fell away to nothing. That was her proven method of proofing, and so intent upon it was she that it might have been that her eyes moving down the page were correcting all the little errors of her own life. At the end of a page, she raised her head, and the newspaper she had borrowed from Abdul caught her eye. She opened to the obituary and read of the life of the man who had made such beautiful things, things difficult to ignore. How wonderful to be so enshrined, to walk through your life with such sure steps. But of course one would have to be a genius. The night she quit piano in despair, she told Alex: "But I'm not a genius! And I just don't think it's worth it if I'm not going to be the best!" "What about me? Am I a genius?" Alex retorted. "Yes!" Anna cried out and watched the pleasure forming on his face.

When she heard Abdul talking to Douglas, the publisher, just outside her door, she quickly put the newspaper away.

Like Abdul, Douglas had a wife and family—but unlike Abdul, he didn't have to worry about money. He'd been set up with the magazine by his father, who had made a fortune in D.C. real estate in the early 'fifties. Douglas knew nothing about running a publication and he freely admitted it, as if it were a point in his favor. He was 35 years old and had never held a real job.

Abdul told Douglas the news of his test grade. "Fantastic!" Douglas said, and Abdul repeated the news to get another, more sincere, more considered "Fantastic!" out of him.

Douglas, so content to be himself, Anna thought. Some mother somewhere must have told him he was it. Otherwise why did he wear that perpetual grin? He had sauntered into Anna's office, looking overconfident, leading with his hips. He was moderately good-looking, but in a spoiled schoolboy way, and he loved to hang around her.

First, he stood by the window, looking down at the 14th Street strip joints and porno shops. The office address was on the much more

respectable 15th Street side, but the suite itself was on the backside of the building. So much else of Washington was sand-blasted stone, immaculate as a cemetery. Fourteenth Street was all hot-pink, eggy-yellow, trash flying everywhere. A neon sign above the doors of one of the strip joints blinked alternately: "This is it!" "This is it?" It was not a well-kept secret that Harold went there every day at eleven for his two or three martinis—and a beer for nutrition.

Douglas talked to Anna about bike-riding. He lived near her in Georgetown—he, in a grand home on tree-lined Q Street; she in a tiny efficiency above a Greek carry-out on noisy M Street. Anna carried her bike down a long dark flight of stairs every morning, with the crossbar on her shoulder. At the front door she braced herself: once she stepped off the sidewalk and joined the rushing traffic, there was danger. Cars seemed to carry her with them; buses bore down behind her. She had to go with the flow of the traffic.

"I thought I saw you fall this morning," Douglas said, jingling the change in his pocket.

"Not me," Anna said guardedly.

"A girl that looked a lot like you was cut off by a taxi. She was sprawled all over the place with her skirt up over her head."

"Glad to say it wasn't I."

"I know it wasn't you—I stopped to see if it was. You don't think I would have kept going if I thought it was you lying there hurt. It worries me that you ride a bike. You could take a ride with me. I go right by your place."

"You don't always come in," Anna said evasively.

He came closer towards her, took the hand out of his pocket, the one that had been jingling the change, and touched the tip of her nose.

Anna recoiled, but he persisted: he pulled her ear and whispered into it: "You know, if you finally do get to know me, you won't find that I'm any better than this, but at least you'll never find that I'm a worse one." Anna opened her mouth to say something—she didn't know what—but Douglas was shaking his head to stop her. He gave her ear another tug, and left the room.

The pigeons resting underneath her air-conditioner were cooing. In Pittsburgh, where she and Alex went to college, two pigeons made a nest in a planter on their balcony. Sometimes they would see the pigeons down on the sidewalk outside their apartment building. Friends doubted that they could tell one pigeon from another, but they knew they could. Neither had ever liked pigeons before that; then, eventually, they watched this couple of them hatch their eggs.

She got up from her desk and tried to sneak up on the pigeons, to get a closer look, but they flew away. If the job included sleeping with Douglas, would she do it? Never. She tried to think of one other thing she knew for sure, and failed.

"YOU KNOW MY WIFE'S JOB is far more demanding than mine," Abdul was telling someone on the phone. "You know how they let me go here and there, whenever I like . . . . She doesn't drive. It takes her forever to get there by bus from Arlington . . . . In Silver Spring . . . . She washes the scalps of American women . . . . She thinks of them as her children, that's how . . . . Yes, she hates them sometimes. Other times, she is in love with them, hopelessly, wanting to be them. Sometimes she wants to kiss their fingers, their toes. Their faces are not beautiful, she tells me, but they are real—you can touch them: that is the important thing. She is not afraid to touch them. She can tell that some of them are afraid of her at first . . . . She wins them over, and then they beam up at her, with their heads all turbaned up in towels . . . . Sometimes she cries, while making dinner . . . . First, I say stop that, sternly, reminding her that she must be strong. But she keeps crying, so that I see that my scolding doesn't do any good. In fact, it's doing harm. So I stop and comfort her, with her head in the crook of my arm."

Anna was listening to Abdul so intently, imagining her own self as somebody's wife, that she jumped when Joan came to her door. She asked Anna if she wanted to go to lunch and help her look for a tennis outfit afterwards. She was signed up for an indoor course this fall and winter. "We seem to have similar taste in clothing," Joan laughed. Anna was too surprised at the friendly invitation to say anything other than yes.

They ate some yogurt, stirring it up as they stood at the newsstand across from the Treasury Building. They sampled the fashion magazines and *Model Aviation's* competition. Then they went around the corner into Garfinkel's. Anna liked being with Joan, much to her surprise; she even liked that they were dressed alike. It made their outing seem somehow official.

The flipped through a rack of tennis dresses. Anna saw in the lighting that Joan was not so young. She had assumed that, like herself, Joan, too, had just graduated, but maybe not. Abdul had hinted to Anna of a serious flirtation Joan was having with Douglas; in fact, he had implied that it was something more. Anna tried to read in Joan's face the truth of this report.

Joan tried on three or four of the dresses then some skirts and tops, modeling them all for Anna, who watched Joan watch herself in the mirror. Joan gave even her own reflected image that same I-dare-you stare. Quickly, decisively, she made her choice—a white, pocketed tennis skirt with a maroon polo shirt and maroon socks.

They strolled around in other departments, like old friends shopping. They started walking back to the office when it was time. Then, waiting to cross at the corner, Anna spotted Alex up ahead at the next crossing.

His back was to her, and for a couple of seconds, she sized him up as if he were a stranger. She was attracted and glad that there were still some decent-looking men left in America. Then she realized who it was.

"Joan! I don't want to see Alex, and he's right ahead of us. Probably he's going up to the office. Do you mind going back by yourself?"

"Who? That guy with the beard? He's cute."

"Yes. You go back up. I'll call you, and you could tell me when he's gone.

They both watched him stride up the hill past the Treasury as the light changed. He was wearing a burgundy muffler around his neck, even though it wasn't at all cold out. Anna knew this meant he could not work. It meant he was going flying: the muffler, the leather jacket, the corduroy pants were all part of his superstitious aviator outfit in any weather. He owned one-quarter of a four-seater plane parked at a Gaithersburg airport.

"Let's both hide," Joan suggested brightly. "I don't feel like going back yet anyway. We can call Abdul and he'll tell us if Alex is gone. And you can tell me why you're ducking around corners, afraid to see your own fiance."

Anna said nothing, and they both took off, two young women in forest green pants, zizagging through the lunch crowd.

They walked up 14th Street, fearless together. Darting into a doorway, they spied on Harold walking down the street on the other side of the block. He must have been returning to the office from "This is it!" At the end of the block, he paused to talk to a man and watch a young black woman walk by. The woman was well-dressed, haughty-looking. The men watched as if she were alive and so expensively groomed for their pleasure alone. Anna couldn't see the expressions on their faces, but she could see their heads slowly turn as the woman passed. After she crossed the street, the men resumed their conversation. I have always envied men their conversations with one another, Anna suddenly realized. She and Joan hurried away so that Harold wouldn't see them.

"So are you going to tell me why you're hiding from your Alex?" Joan asked over the noise of groaning buses.

"It's nothing too mysterious," Anna replied. "I think I don't want to be married to him after all. But I haven't told him yet. This is the first I've admitted it, even to myself."

"Engagements are broken off all the time," Joan mused.

"Are they?" Anna asked hopefully. She tried to believe that Joan was a good source for that kind of information. She felt as if she were moving down the sidewalk of a foreign city, things were so different. She'd never been walking on this street before. She'd only driven it or seen it from her office window.

"Yes. Plus, it's better than divorce. I know."

They walked in silence, past windows blocked with paint and paper to hide what was behind them. Customers made quick, deft entrances and exits; only proprietors lingered in front of these storefronts. Eyes followed Anna and Joan, but Anna, for one, didn't want to turn back. She felt protected, with Joan by her side. And she didn't want to see Alex.

But they couldn't walk forever. It was getting to be a very lengthy lunch hour. Finally Joan suggested that Anna stop at the next payphone and make the call to Abdul:

"Is Alex there, Abdul?"

"He was here and now he's gone."

"How long ago did he leave?"

"Ten minutes."

They hurried back to the office, Anna ready to dart around a corner if she had to. "But what's the big deal about seeing him?" Joan asked, out of breath now as they trudged.

"If I see him I'll love him," Anna said simply.

In the golden lobby, in the middle of it, there was a seedy coffee shop and a newspaper stand. A man sat there all day with a hat on, smoking cigars. He wouldn't let Anna read the magazines—he wouldn't let anybody read them, but Anna took it personally. Near the stand they found not Alex but Douglas, who called Joan over to have a private word with him. For once, he wasn't smiling. Joan obeyed, and Anna went up to the suite alone.

"Long lunch today," Abdul said, glancing at the clock when Anna walked in. Next to him was Alex sitting in a chair and nervously batting his chest with his scarf.

Anna glared at Abdul, thinking: he may as well not have any legs, he's always sitting there watching everything.

Alex followed her into her office. She stood at the window, looking down at where she just had been. She held onto the windowsill, bracing herself as if for a blow or a vibration of the building.

"Come with me this afternoon," Alex whispered into her ear.

"I can't, I can't," she said, staring ahead.

"Tell them you're sick to your stomach."

He drew her in close to his side.

"Can't, can't."

"Will you come over tonight?"

She said nothing, just sighed, thinking: he's drawing me in, even as I resist. I used to pay such close attention to him, thinking something might be revealed, something important, something told just once. I had the distinct impression I was going to learn something about myself.

"I love you and I need you to practice the orchestral part of *Rhapsody* with me."

"I'll come," Anna said. "But it'll be late. After *Tosca*."

After he left she went out to confront Abdul. She just stood in front of him and stared. He was holding the photo of his little girl. "Civilization often progresses as the result of lies, my friend," he said, and his purple lips, outlined in black, were perfectly smooth.

She walked out of the office, headed she didn't know where, maybe to harass the man with the magazines downstairs. She'd buy one, read it there. Impatiently she waited for the elevator down, but when the doors opened, out came Douglas, then Joan, who was sobbing into her hands. When she saw Anna, Joan ran for the stairway, while Douglas continued down the bright orange carpet to the office. Anna followed after Joan, who threw herself onto the floor of the stairwell. Her sobs echoed loudly. Anna sat down beside her on the cold cement and patted the back of this stranger. Joan sat up and fell into her arms. Anna sat comforting her, feeling the wetness of Joan's tears soak through her blouse to her chest. Neither one of them had a Kleenex. Joan had only a little calendar in her great big black purse. She tore pages out of it and blew her nose with those. There were tissues in the ladies' room, but it was locked. Abdul had a key, but neither one of them wanted to move from this spot.

"Once, I went to one of those swinging clubs with him," Joan said through subsiding tears. "To meet another couple, maybe. We almost went to a party, but I chickened out at the very end. One of the men came up to me—I'd never seen him before—and touched the tip of my breast. Now the idea of it sickens me.

"The first time Douglas came on to me, I didn't see how I was going to get out of it, so I did something really dumb: I asked him for money. At least I could get that much out of it, I thought. He wrote me a check. It bounced! My bank charged me $15 for a returned check fee. It ended up costing me money to get screwed."

Joan laughed bitterly, her closed eyes looking as if they burned. Anna laughed, too, half-heartedly, thinking: are these the only kinds of secrets that women have to tell each other?

She remembered she had told so many of her secrets to Alex, her deepest ones. Of failures, embarrassments, and cruelties she'd been guilty of. And she had told him stories of other people's failures, and he, growing uncomfortable, had told her in turn, it was okay, not necessary to divulge too much, some things were best left hidden. But Anna went on anyway, soothed by the sounds of betrayal, by the very sounds of her own voice.

"Just once," Joan said, "I'd like to be introduced as 'Joan Gordon, Brain Surgeon.' Except that then I'd probably want to go back to being Joan Gluck again. That sounds much more brain surgeon-y than Gordon, don't you think?" This time the two young women laughed genuinely, and couldn't stop laughing for awhile.

Then, after they had sat for several long minutes in silence, Joan stood and smoothed the starry pockets of her pants. Anna could see that she felt better. She expected Joan to say that she was ready to go

back to the office. Instead she told Anna that she didn't want to be left alone. Could Anna be with her all night? Could they get out of here right now? Would Anna just come with her? Anna said yes.

She went back into the office to get her knapsack—she'd leave her bike here overnight—and began to think of things she might say to Joan, things she should say to herself: "You know you can still love men without hating yourself." That was the most important thing. Then she thought: we all have these powers over each other, and most of us don't know the first thing to do with them.

She put away into folders the copy on which she'd been working. It could all wait until tomorrow. And if Douglas fired her, fine. She knew she was going back to live with Alex, anyway. But would she go back to piano? Never. She calmed herself, thinking of the clean, right beauty of words, printed in lines of straight copy, "justified" the word for no ragged edges of type. As a child, she had thought authors composed their sentences exactly to widths that would make the lines all come out even. It seemed like an impossible task in such a messy world, and yet whole bookshelves told her that it was being done, had been done time and time again, like magic. Maybe she would go back to poetry. One of the pigeons took off from the ledge, catching her attention. Much more of a miracle than a plane. Off the side of a building, flying not falling like a rock or a suicide. Passing once more through reception, she did not say good-bye to Abdul. Anyway, he had his ear to the universe: "Got B!" he was telling someone else on the phone. "B!"

From The Well Of Sleep

J. B. GOODENOUGH

Pull me up from deep sleep
With a noise like winching water
In buckets from the well,

And I will tell you dreams
Of moss and stones and dark
And dead birds and echoes:

Disperse me in tin cups among
The hired hands, gathered under
Broad noon at harvest-time,

And I will sing them songs
Of light lost in black water
And white bones washed clean.

'Ship of Fools': Katherine Anne Porter in Decline

JIM CORY

Of sunlight and sea water was her divine nature made, and her unique power as goddess was that she could reveal to men the truth about themselves by showing to each man himself in his true shape according to his inmost nature. For this she was rightly dreaded and feared; her very name was a word of terror.

Katherine Anne Porter, "A Defense of Circe"

EARLY IN 1962, the New York literary world found something worth talking about. It was *Ship of Fools*, Katherine Anne Porter's novel, imminently due from her publisher. For years, colleagues and friends had speculated as to whether or not she would finish the work, though pieces had appeared in a number of magazines, including *Sewanee Review*, *Harper's* and *Mademoiselle*. Now, apparently, her moment had arrived.

At 497 pages, *Ship of Fools* was exactly two pages longer than all the fiction Katherine Anne Porter had previously published. Its launching had all the trappings of a major event. Journalists clamored for interviews with the testy white-haired author. The more they heard, the more they wanted to know. That *Ship of Fools* was her only novel after a writing career of almost 40 years, that its author was 73, that she had been working on it two decades, made wonderful copy.

The interviews and articles about her made the novel Katherine Anne Porter's first and only bestseller. Previously a writer's writer, a power within the literary establishment, a woman whose reputation amounted to something like *grand dame* of the American short story, she now became a figure for the general public of bestsellerdom, television, and the newsweeklies. The myth was that she had steadily

toiled at her book in the face of overwhelming difficulties and endless distractions, ultimately to triumph by creating what several reviewers, including Mark Shorer in *The New York Times,* called " a classic."

Porter was very active over the years in developing this image of herself as a dedicated artist. Though there is much truth in it, it *is* a stylization: she was not above distorting or misrepresenting facts about her life, and even ultimately believing some of her misrepresentations. In some ways, *Ship of Fools* is the result of Porter's entrapment of herself in her own image. And because it was produced under this strained condition, its handling of theme (and at times technique) is strained and unconvincing as well.

Almost 40 years before, when she published her first story "Maria Conception" in *Century,* she was anything but the literary lady. Born on a dirt-poor farm in Texas, she had gravitated toward New York as a sort of aimless Bohemian. Mexicans she met there persuaded her to go to their country, where she found inspiration for her first three stories. By then she was already in her early thirties, and she wrote nothing more for three years. She then produced a series of small jewels like "He" and "Rope." Then came the amazing "Jilting of Granny Weatherall," published in *transition.* When "Flowering Judas" appeared in *Hound and Horn,* it established her reputation for good. The stories she wrote in the 20s and 30s—all she would ever publish—were collected into three separate volumes. *Flowering Judas and other Stories* appeared in 1930. *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*—the three short novels that make up her masterpiece—came out in 1939. Five years later, miscellaneous stories were gathered together under the title *The Leaning Tower and other Stories.* That was it, until *Ship of Fools* was published.

Her career was slow in beginning, then, and its major phase was soon over. In addition, she lived the life of a restless, almost a driven, person: during the years she composed these stories, she lived in New York, Mexico, Bermuda, Berlin, Switzerland, Paris, and Louisiana. One of her biographers estimates that during the course of her adult life, Katherine Anne Porter lived in at least 50 different places. This roving way of life frequently became the excuse to set aside her writing for a while. A while would become months, and comparatively few of those places found their way into her fiction. Her later life was no less peripatetic. Never well-paid for her work and something of a spendthrift as well, she was forced to live a hand-to-mouth existence, subsisting on grants and fellowships, trying to make ends meet through literary odd-jobs like book-reviewing. She began teaching literature and creative writing in 1953, and worked in Hollywood for a time. But need does not explain this variety completely: it stems from the same sort of aimlessness one finds in her early career, and as the

years go by one finds more and more in Porter downright laziness and a desire to be distracted from her real work.

At this same time, the image-making had begun in dead earnest. The roving Bohemian was acting like the *grand dame.* Photographs from this period show her in gowns, jewels, and furs; she was always immaculately coiffed. When she arrived to be interviewed by the *Texas Observer* in 1958, she was clad in "fox stole, a rich velvet hat of huge circumference, pearls, and a lorgnette." (Later, the first thing she bought with her huge royalties from *Ship* was a $20,000 emerald ring).

Perhaps it is only human for such a much-heralded writer to pose as an institution. But the image-making did not stop here, and it reaches more questionable dimensions. In her later years, she fed reporters and academics all sorts of misinformation to throw them off the biographical scent. She wanted them to believe she was a Southerner of aristocratic birth, the descendant of important personages in the nation's history, a woman of impeccable taste in furniture, clothing and the arts, rather than the product of a poor background. (Her personal aesthetics were actually on the baroque side). She was not related to William Sydney Porter ('O. Henry'). At one point, she tried to claim Daniel Boone as a relative through her Kentucky ancestors, whereas the connection was actually to Jonathan Boone, the explorer's brother.

She embroidered on the truth whenever it suited her. She romanticized herself and her life. If something shabby or irresponsible had happened in her past, she simply changed or eliminated it. For example, she subtracted her second marriage, considering Ernest Stock not worth mentioning to interviewers. (She had called him "Deadly Ernest" behind his back.) Consequently two biographies, appearing about a year apart, list her as married three and four times respectively. She claimed to have been brought up a Catholic, but turns out to have been raised a Methodist. (She converted to Catholicism.) All this started early: in her teens she had changed her name from Callie to Katherine Anne, after the adored grandmother who had largely raised her.

It was the fiction, naturally, that pointed critics to her background and raised these questions and, subsequently, these discrepancies. They wanted to locate the real Miss Porter inside her stories. But she was just as anxious that the body of Porter folklore lie undisturbed. There was much there that didn't wash. In a sense, even her claim to be a Southern writer (see her essay "'Noon Wine': The Sources") was a posture. It was something she found alluring as a result of her friendships with several of the Fugitives group. In stories like "He" or "Noon Wine" or "Holiday", and in the sketches that made up "The Old Order," she wasn't writing about the South so much as Texas, a place at great remove from the classic plantations of Georgia and the

Carolinas. She saw herself as competing with Faulkner for the title of leading Southern storyteller. He had successfully recreated the history of the region, had dramatized the decay of its moral order in both the pre- and post-bellum South, and had drawn his characters from every stratum of Southern society. She produced a handful of stories set in the Texas of her youth. Yet so anxious was she to institutionalize herself that she dismissed his achievement as "wormy fake Koestler."

There is also evident in Porter a lack of generosity toward her fellow woman writers and a thin-skinned egotism of a particularly unpleasant sort. She did acknowledge the genius of Emily Dickinson and Willa Cather, but totally ignored Edith Wharton and other female writers. Her treatment of Gertrude Stein is particularly revealing. She denounced Stein for playing the great literary lady after the surprise success of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, while she herself was doing exactly the same. When she visited Stein in Paris, in the company of Allen Tate and Caroline Gordon, Stein as was her custom ignored the women and conversed only with Tate. Some years later Porter's nephew Paul called on Stein, and Stein claimed not to know who Katherine Anne Porter was. It is understandable the Porter would be offended personally by this behavior. But she went further—as with Faulkner she elevated a personal grudge to the level of literary criticism. In her essay "The Wooden Umbrella," which appeared in *Harper's* a year after Stein's death, Porter savagely debunked Stein's importance to modern letters. It came to this: Stein was lazy, undisciplined, pretentious, megalomaniacal. "Wise or silly or nothing at all, down everything goes on the page with the air of everything being equal, unimportant in itself, important because it happened to her and she was writing about it."

THE FIRST PART of her judgment of Stein is as we have seen highly ironic: Porter was herself not without ego, lack of discipline, etc. But it is the second part—Porter's sneering at Stein's improvisatory method—that carries with it more serious implications about Porter's (mis–) understanding of herself and in particular about the artistic failure of *Ship of Fools*. In her glory years, Porter wrote great stories in part precisely *because* she was free from a grounding in any particular place or literary method. She wasn't meant to recreate the old South (like Faulkner), or perform literary experiments (like Stein), or (as she attempted in *Ship*) make metaphors for the decline of civilization, to be philosophical. She was an American pragmatist. She worked best in miniatures that dramatize the inner mechanics of human behavior, the forces that,

right or wrong, shape the human heart to their own ends.

In her 26 stories, there occurs a remarkable variety of people and situations. A half dozen, including "Flowering Judas," are set in Mexico. She writes with considerable authority about Irish immigrants in two of them: "The Cracked Looking Glass" and "A Day's Work." In "The Leaning Tower"—the subtle cynicism of which offered readers a taste of what was to come from her typewriter twenty-some years later—she wrote about Germany as it existed in the period immediately prior to Hitler. Most of the remaining stories are set either in Texas or New York City.

For someone who wrote frequently about other countries, she manages to be among the most American of writers. She reacted to exotic places and peoples as an American, more specifically, as an American woman. Her writing registered the reaction. She judged, and judged severely, but she was far too much the artist to let her judgements stand in the way of characterization. Rather, she let characterization speak to her judgments. Her eye, once placed, observed its subjects with cool objectivity.

The stories vary widely in structure and length. She wrote short shorts ("Magic"), stories of conventional length, long stories ("Hacienda" or "Holiday") and several she firmly insisted were not "nouvelles" but rather short novels. Whatever the nomenclature, that diversity is testament to her art. She approached a story with no easy formula. Rather, she invented her own treatment as she worked the materials. Each is somewhat different from the next.

But as different as they are from one another, the stories are finally all of a piece. Her favorite narrative device—"Holiday" is the significant exception—was the limited third person. Her writing voice slides in and out of the thinking of characters at will, working in details, bending the information to a moral purpose. In "He," for example, we are able to really experience the agony of the Whipples, who are faced with having to put their retarded son in a county home. At the same time, we know what "He" (their son) is thinking. ("He knew they were sending Him away for good and all because they were too poor to keep Him. Whatever it was, Mrs. Whipple couldn't bear to think of it. She began to cry, frightfully, and wrapped her arms tight around Him . . .") The predicament becomes a moral one as we step inside the characters. Always there is some choice. Often, a shabby compromise is the result.

She saw people as selfish, self-deceiving, all the more pathetic for being completely at the mercy of their circumstances. Yet, often enough, she found a fragile dignity for them. She rarely condemned her characters outright: the fraudulent Mexican revolutionary Braggioni, Mr. Hatch (the bounty hunter in "Noon Wine"), Kennerly (the American film producer in "Hacienda") are among the excep-

tions. That she pitied and understood the Whipples of this world there can be no doubt. Her sympathy, after all, rested on direct experience.

Like Poe, she had an interest in the disordered mind. Often it provided the forum for her very best writing, with a near-visionary clarity and poetic depth. The axe murder in "Noon Wine" takes place in a hallucinatory vacuum. In "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," an old woman dipping in and out of near-coma remembers the day she was left at the altar, not with horror or shame but with a sort of befuddled wonder at what might have happened to her life otherwise. In the drift of senility, in consciousness timed to die in slow stages with the body, Porter found the narrative vehicle for that grim memory and the way it had worked to shape her character. In "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," Miranda Gay comes under the spell of a fever brought on by a near-fatal bout of flu. ("A pallid white fog rose in their wake insinuatingly and floated before Miranda's eyes, a fog in which was concealed all terror and all weariness, all the wrung faces and twisted backs and broken feet of abused, outraged living things; the fog might part at any moment and loose the horde of human torments.") Here her subject was death: the Pale Rider that almost takes Miranda, but settles instead for her lover, Adam. In this, one of her finest tales, she wanted to show that there was one thing worth fighting through all human sordidness to have, and that it was love. Yet, fundamentally pessimistic, she felt compelled to rob Miranda, her fictional double, of that prize.

In an age when contemporaries like Faulkner, Hemingway and Thomas Wolfe wrote in distinct, widely imitated and instantly recognizable styles, Katherine Anne Porter fashioned for herself an instrument of such subtlety and precision, so free of manner and ornament, that we are scarcely even aware of the narrative voice. In a 1940 essay on Thomas Hardy, she had defined what she felt to be good prose: "When I read it," she wrote, "it almost disappears from view, and afterward comes back, phraseless, living in its somber clearness . . ." That describes her own writing as much as Hardy's. She wrote in straightforward, declarative sentences, like the ex-reporter she was, and these have a natural, rolling feel and thrust to them that makes Hemingway's prose seem stilted, even affected. She rarely used overtly literary devices like the simile. When she did, her choice was invariably to deepen the feeling for character rather than to demonstrate her cleverness as the writer. In "The Cracked Looking Glass," she describes a woman's reaction to an impudent and totally unexpected proposition: ". . . the blood boiled up in her face until it was like looking through a red veil." In "Hacienda," Kennerly's nerves ". . . were bundles of dried twigs, they jabbed his insides every time a thought stirred." In "Old Mortality," she created

one of the most pitifully vivid drunks in American literature and never got close to the smug phrases of cliche. Uncle Gabriel, she tells us, wiped his face ". . . as though there were cobwebs on it."

Denise Levertov once advanced the theory that the poem exists in the world, waiting for its poet. Porter had a similar theory about the short story. The pieces of a story found their way inside her head, gestated in her imagination, grew to birthable size, then spilled suddenly onto the page. It was a transformation from quantity to quality: from a seemingly meaningless pile of random details to a meaningful narrative of human intercourse. Porter's view may be viewed as a justification for aimlessness and even laziness—but it is also a genuine artistic method which in her case produced great literature.

BUT IT IS DISTINCTLY NOT a method conducive to writing a philosophical novel for an appreciative audience that after long deprivation expected a literary monument. Her admirers had been conditioned by the author to expect such a thing, and her efforts at self-promotion were to backfire on her. Like E. M. Forster, an author she admired, she had become famous with every book she didn't write. Prodded by publishers, badgered by friends, pursued by rumors of *Ship of Fool's* existence, she had to produce the novel as a labor of guilt.

The novel originated, like Porter's stories, in an improvisatory, pragmatic exercise. Indeed it was to *be* a story, to grow out of a series of letters she wrote to Caroline Gordon while Porter and her third husband-to-be, Eugene Pressly, travelled to Europe aboard a German freighter in the summer of 1932. The story was to be called "Promised Land." Quite unexpectedly—and dangerously, given Porter's method and the demands of the form of a novel like this—it grew to the proportions of a novel in her mind: *No Safe Harbor* was her first working title. She herself had doubts (as did her friends) about her ability to finish it, and her usual distractions got in the way of her work. But it became something she *had* to do.

In *Ship of Fools*, an omniscient narrator tells us about the passengers aboard a vessel called the *Vera*, a German freight and passenger ship making a 26 day voyage from Vera Cruz to Bremerhaven in late August and early September, 1931. There are dozens of major characters in first class. About half of them are Germans. There is also an older Swiss couple with their homely teenage daughter, an arrogant engineer from Texas, a troupe of eight Spanish dancers, and the terrible twin offspring of one of the pairs in the troupe. Additionally, there are David Scott and Jenny Brown, Americans traveling together but in separate cabins; a Swede, six

Cuban medical students en route to France, and a middle-aged American divorcee named Mary Treadwell. Eight hundred seventy-six Spaniards are below decks, in steerage, deported from Cuba because of a collapse in world sugar prices.

Almost without exception, the characters aboard the *Vera* behave ignobly. Drunkenness, quarrels, fornications and every sort of nastiness abound. The Spanish dancers—pimps and whores all of them—infuriate the stodgy Germans, providing a center for what little dramatic tension there is in the novel. The passengers form cliques. Rivalries develop. Essentially, the story unfolds as dozens and dozens of small episodes, these organized in three big blocks of writing.

Porter's passengers are painstakingly observed. We move through cabins where people are shaving, dressing, making love, getting sick. Voyeur-like we follow them to those more secluded spots on the ship where groping, drunken assignations take place. The intimacy of these details gives us a sense of people living at close quarters with strangers whom they despise.

As critics noted, Porter's vision of the human race in this novel was a cruel one. Not only does she have no sympathy for them: her characters have little sympathy for each other. In the world of *Ship* selfishness has become the dominant, almost the only, human trait. For instance, "Even with the best will in the world, with nothing but kindness in your heart, Frau Schmitt felt again for the thousandth time, how difficult it is to be good, innocent, friendly, simple, in a world where no one seems to understand or sympathize with another; it seemed all too often that no one really wished even to try to be a little charitable." She was not speaking merely for Frau Schmitt. She was speaking for Katherine Anne Porter.

Probably the most direct reflections of Porter in the novel are Jenny Brown, the superficial and morally confused artist (a portrayal of Porter the aimless Bohemian), and Mary Treadwell, the older woman who has failed to find love and deals with her cynicism by hiding not very convincingly behind the airs of a woman of the world. Neither the will to believe nor the will to conceal works in the novel, a further reflection of Porter's increasing cynicism.

The thematic problem in the novel, then, is oversimplification. All we know of the characters is that they will increasingly exercise their capacity for selfishness, manipulation, treachery, lust, and greed. They have no visible redeeming qualities, and even their depradations are presented without mischief or glee.

"When I began thinking about my novel," she wrote in a one-paragraph introduction to the book, "I took for my own this simple almost universal image of the ship of this world on its voyage to eternity." She must also have thought of politics early on as well, for the

novel is obviously concerned with the politics of the world immediately prior to Hitler's take-over in Germany. The point is that these approaches are broad and pointed: they are the exact opposite of the method that had worked so well for her in her stories—the sharp, pragmatic observation of human beings and situations that evolved into theme.

Each of Porter's stories has a moral center: the seed from which the tale roots itself in the reader's imagination and grows there. But *Ship of Fools* has no such center. Its statement as a work of literature goes little further than the title would allow: men and women are fools; they go through life stepping on each other. Thus the book's frequent lapses into grotesquerie. That it is as readable as it is owes not to its vision but to the technical mastery Porter applied to its composition. All her genius as a stylist is there: the vividness of imagery, the perfect integrity of realistic detail. But in sharp contrast to her earlier fiction (which used limited third person and first-person narration), the point of view here is omniscient. We do not see inside these characters—they are caricatures rather than fully-fleshed human beings.

This is because the author of the stories was a somewhat less grand, less worldly, less cynical person than the novelist. There's a quality of humility and sympathy in the stories that just isn't in the novel. Not that there wasn't always a hard side to her writing: she prided herself on having no illusions about human beings or their behavior. In the opening pages of "Hacienda," for example, her characters are at their hateful worst. Yet the stories always contained a character invested with some sincerity or warmth; there was always something to add color and shade to the moral grayness. Ironically, Katherine Anne Porter became famous for abandoning her best self and her best work. The young, aimless, pragmatic bohemian was more capable of hitting on human truths than the self-styled *grand dame* struggling to convey deep philosophical insights in a form uncongenial to her.

Sources

1. Givner, Joan, *Katherine Anne Porter, A Life*, 1982, Simon and Schuster, New York, NY.
2. Lopez, Enrique Hank, *Conversations with Katherine Anne Porter, Refugee from Indian Creek*, 1981, Little, Brown and Co., Boston, MA.
3. Porter, Katherine Anne, *The Collected Essays and Occasional*

Writings of Katherine Anne Porter, 1973, Dell Publishing Co., New York, NY.

4. Porter, Katherine Anne, *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter*, 1965, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., New York, NY.
5. Porter, Katherine Anne, *Ship of Fools*, 1962, Little, Brown and Co., Boston, MA.
6. *Katherine Anne Porter, A Collection of Critical Essays*, Robert Penn Warren, ed., 1979, Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J.

Love Poem

KAREN GREEN

What is a poem?
A poem is a caught thought
With a pattern to it,
A trapped bird
In a Magritte hatted picture
Not let go
But turned into something other,
Seen in a gallery
Or carried in the mind—
Sketched on stone.

What is love?
Love is a poem contracted between two people
(Its wonderment is less accessible
To the world at large,
Larger than the world to you),
Not exactly written down
But documented in other ways,
Carried in the heart,
Felt at the quick of the nail—
Etched on bone.

Devil's Kitchen

BECKY BRADWAY

THE VISIT TO SCOTTIE's was a detour on her semi-annual run to Illinois. Folk Art was what Diane was after: people paid for it, looking for the romance in somebody else's past. This time, she came away from her father's house with all of his recent woodwork. A maple table, a four-drawer cherry dresser, a simple oak desk, and a ton of knicknacks: a good haul that would bring enough cash to keep her Dad in pine for thirty years, if he lived that long.

Diane told herself that she was in it for the money, this junk-hunting; but even more than the buyers she was looking for the one perfect piece that would keep her warm. She travelled miles for finds, usually coming up disappointed, but the possibility of surprise kept her on the road. Diane was on the narrow highway through Southern Illinois because the word had come from Scottie's mother: her daughter had a Rose of Sharon quilt one hundred and fifty years old, and she wanted to sell.

Last Christmas Diane had got a card from Scottie with jolly Santa on the front, smoke from a pipe curling around his head, the kind bought in boxes of fifty. Inside was a photo of Scottie and her husband and their five kids, all smiling. Scottie was hugely pregnant.

Diane figured the urge for massive reproduction was in the genes. Scottie had grown up in a family of twelve, in a wild house with a weedy yard piled with junked cars and kids. Her father worked sporadically, her mother not at all; they got by on welfare, a sin in farm country, the land of the work ethic. The adults called them trash, but the kids loved that house; they could get away with anything there.

Diane was first invited to Scottie's in her sophomore year of high school: a major thrill. Going there was her initiation into the ranks of high popularity, even though at first she was only invited to tutor Scottie in biology.

It was Diane's first look at real sensualists. She and Scottie opened the book, but never got past the first paragraph. Kids and decrepit-looking adults were moving through the kitchen, grabbing food and drinking beer, and Scottie couldn't keep herself from talking back. Diane finally discovered why people flunked classes. That evening

began a series of party nights that dropped Diane to the lower third of her class, not that she cared. Her mother tried to keep her away from Scottie's, but nothing worked; Diane had been gleefully corrupted. They were the only two years in her life that she had really blown off: college turned her back into a dutiful workaholic, and Scottie got married, as all the kids that passed through the wild house split away from each other, struggling alone into adulthood.

An A-frame cabin at the end of a side road along Devil's Kitchen nature reserve, the directions said: now that she was in the area, Diane had no idea where she was really supposed to be. Somehow, she had ended up in the midst of angular and looming pines that darkened the road, even on that sunny day.

Her only previous trip to Southern Illinois had been for the senior class picnic in high school. That had been a bright holiday: climbing on cliffs, wading into a lake, smoking dope behind trees. Now, having lost the sense of adventure that blinds new travellers, Diane saw the area differently. After the spare roominess of the West, the comparative wealth of Colorado, and the crowded streets of Denver, this place was too silent, spotted with ugly and desperate-seeming towns where the roofs were in need of repair and nobody shopped in the dime stores. The land itself was rolling and forested. But it was marred by rusted cranes and stripped of vegetation, telling the real story of people who were scraping by.

Somehow, she had gotten herself trapped in the middle of Devil's Kitchen. The looping forest curves seemed endless. They circled back in on her, like one of those nightmares where repetition is the theme. Although she was moving, it seemed all the same; there were no landmarks, no signs.

She had passed only one car, a long blue Cadillac with tinted windows. Diane felt certain that there was a dead person in that car. She stuck a ZZ Top cassette into the tape player and turned it up loud, singing along with ZZ about a girl who knew how to use her legs. It didn't help; her own voice sounded hollow to her, and she stopped.

Although she rarely questioned her motives anymore, she wondered why she was there. Considering herself a serious businesswoman, she liked to think it was for the money; the quilt would bring a lot, if it was a good one. But money wasn't enough to make her want to be around a person from her past. Diane avoided people who saw her the way she was fifteen years ago, people from the old home town who could never understand the way she lived. There was no common ground; when she visited home and accidently ran into one or two in town, she found herself nodding, unable to speak. That old high school uneasiness came right back, that feeling that *she* was the one out of step, and she compensated by thinking about her true

superiority. They were ignorant people, but they always seemed to hold the edge, as if their very lack of awareness was their power. They lived by their senses.

She had to see the quilt. It might warm the white wall in her apartment, offset the fake fur couch that she had insisted on buying. Her place was neat, well-ordered, always swept. She found herself putting coasters under glasses of iced tea so that the wood would never mar.

Scottie would never have done that. That old childhood house was disruptive, scattered, loud, and comfortable. As much as Diane loved her delicate glassware and her serene Impressionist prints, they kept her house from being that home. If only she could be comfortable without the disarray. Quilts were the most inviting of all antiques, and it was so rare to find one with that honest quality, a really old and used one, not destroyed by wear. Scottie would have that. She was the only person Diane could imagine that would.

THE MAILBOX WAS PAINTED blue, the name RAY scrawled in paint along its side. Diane travelled down a short drive until she reached the A-frame, which was set behind two huge oak trees and a row of scraggly hedges that looked as if they had never been trimmed. She pulled up behind a tan Buick with a badly crushed front fender and a cracked windshield held together with black tape.

The yard was littered with dog shit and broken toys. A rusted red playground set was near the road, a swing moving in the breeze. The steps to the porch were cracked, and Diane felt unstable. She wondered, if she fell through, if some terrible being under the porch would chew her leg off.

Knocking on the door, she wondered where all the noisy kids were. The door was wooden and scratched, as if a pack of wolves had been at it, trying to get in. When nobody answered, she pounded. She was an hour late, but she still expected Scottie to be there; where else would she be? Diane didn't think she could hack another round of Devil's Kitchen, and she kept pounding until Scottie Ray appeared, a chocolate-splattered child on her hip, a baby bottle in her hand.

"Sorry, but Ronnie . . ." Scottie shifted the child to a higher position, and motioned for Diane to come in. "Gosh, it's been a long time. I'd hug you, but my hands are full. Did you get lost? The roads are murder out here."

Diane opened the screen door, feeling almost tearful relief. Scottie's smile was as wonderful as it had always been, emitting a sense of awe and expectation, as if she believed that life was good. It had always been Scottie's strength, the trait that made her more than just another cheerleader. It was a broad smile, upturning delicately at

the corners, fresh.

But her face showed wear—it was clear her life was hard—and she looked distracted by motherhood. Her blue jeans were faded nearly white, her blouse was sleeveless and shapeless, but her body was lean and muscular, her hair still that perfect crow's-wing blue-black. Diane felt that terrible, almost forgotten envy, from the days when she had followed Scottie like an admiring pup: how dare she look so good?

On the other hand, Scottie's house let Diane have the perverse satisfaction of knowing that justice had been done, that things were even between them. Most of the first floor of the A-frame was one room, divided by a counter into living space and kitchen. The walls and floor were bare and unpainted wood—not nice wood, but plywood-stuff that made her want to sneeze. Behind the kitchen was another room, separated from the rest of the area by a hanging blanket.

Two battered red sofas and a telephone wire spool were the only furniture in the make-shift living room. A large console TV of the kind Diane's parents had in the sixties took up much of the space. Two boards resting on cement blocks supported a row of paperback books and a cheap child's record player. Thumb-tacked to the wall were a Confederate flag and a familiar Picasso without a frame.

"You can put your bag here." Scottie gestured to a spot on the floor. "I'm afraid you're gonna have to sleep on the couch. I couldn't get my husband to give up the bedroom." Two flushed circles showed on Scottie's cheeks. She came from a family where guests were offered every comfort, even when there wasn't much to give.

"That's okay. I can't stay long, anyway."

"Surely you'll be here overnight. It's a lot easier to get around in the daytime."

Diane hadn't forgotten Devil's Kitchen. "Maybe I'll stay."

"Yeah, of course you should. We got a lot to catch up on. Last time I saw you was that Christmas. Didn't even have all my kids with me. Shit, half of them weren't even born yet."

"I wasn't even married." Diane pushed away a child's toy car so she could sit on the sofa.

"Your husband sure looks cute from the picture you sent." Scottie sat beside Diane, resting the baby's head on her bent arm. "I don't get back much anymore. Talk to the folks on the phone. It was Mom told me about your business."

"How is she?" Diane remembered Scottie's mother: overweight, with her polyester shirt tail hanging out, a Bud in her hand, laughing.

Scottie adjusted the baby on her lap, stuck a pacifier in its mouth. "Oh fine, they're all fine. All us kids are scattered now. One here, one there. Just three still in Hartley. Ray got as far as Hawaii."

"Great." Diane wondered if Ray was still selling hot stereo parts.

"We always were restless. I sure never expected to find myself down here. Remember when we used to talk about Jamaica. Now why do you suppose we ever picked that?" Scottie smoothed the thin brown strands of the baby's hair. She looked into Diane's eyes and started to laugh. "I bet you're waiting to see the quilt."

"No."

"Hah! You want to know about a musty old blanket than you do about me. You always did have a one-track mind, Mulrooney." Scottie patted Diane's knee to let her know that she was teasing. Her hands were lined and cracked. "I guess it's not Mulrooney, though."

"I'm married, but it's still the same. I kept my own name."

"Is that legal?"

Diane tried not to laugh, and nodded.

"Roger would kill me," Scottie said.

They went upstairs to see the quilt.

Although from the outside the house appeared large, it was actually cramped. The children shared the upstairs loft, which was divided by sheets of plywood into three rooms. Each room was barely large enough to hold two twin beds. It was designed like a hospital ward.

Scottie, still carrying the baby, led Diane around one partition. The child (who Diane thought was being strangely silent) finally began to whimper.

"Lucy likes it, so we hung the quilt up in her room. She's my eight year-old. Jane will be glad to see you take it, because now she'll be able to put up her Michael Jackson poster."

The quilt was draped across one wall. It made the shabby room cheerful, with its pinks and blues, its crescents of cloth with minutely flowered print. Small flowers into large flowers, the details reflecting the whole: time had been spent. It was larger than normal, really too large for the short and narrow beds of the 1800's, as if the craftsman had gotten carried away. The stitches were minute and always even. Diane lifted the edge of the spread. The side facing the wall was frayed and faded; but, even so, it had been well cared for.

Diane wanted it now, for herself.

"How much?"

"I don't know." Scottie laid the baby on the bed, where it kicked its feet. Standing in the middle of the floor, her hands on her hips, she looked at the quilt as if she had never examined it before. "I sort of hate to part with it."

"I don't remember seeing this at your parents' house. Was it packed away?" Diane ran her hand over the cloth.

"Oh, it's not from mine. Roger's great-grandmother made it." Scottie's hands were firmly shoved in the back pockets of her jeans. Her face had delicate planes that were now set like rock.

Ethically, the whole thing wasn't right. Diane should be dealing with Roger. But she wanted the quilt.

"Where *is* he?"

"Out. Look, I need the money, and I'm selling it." Scottie was without sentiment.

"Are you sure?"

She tapped her foot in exasperation. "I don't want to pass his family on through mine, okay? It doesn't mean a damn to me."

"It's worth a lot."

"Give me the fair price. I know you will."

Diane sat on the edge of the bed. She picked at the twisted bottom fringe of the cheap red blanket that the child slept with. "Why are you doing this?"

"I need the money." Scottie enunciated each word, as if she was speaking to a dimwit. "Look. I was going to wait, but since you want to know. I'd like you to take us out of here. If you can. I know it's a lot to ask, but if you could drive us to my folks . . . I need the money to set up, you know?" Scottie pulled at her hair; her eyes slid away from Diane's and she paced to the window. Asking for help humiliated her. Diane could never remember Scottie asking for anything, unless she could provide a favor in return. The favor was the quilt.

"I don't know . . ."

"Six kids is a lot. That's true." Scottie didn't turn from the window. Her voice was thin. "And I haven't seen you for a long time. But my car doesn't run, and I can't take the bus. Someone would see us and tell Rog. I'm stuck, you know?"

Diane wondered if she should console her old friend, wrap her in a hug, but it didn't seem right. Scottie was so embarrassed.

"I don't want to, but I won't say no." Diane looked at the soothing spheres of the blanket. A tranquil piece, harmonic, it seemed to have no place here. "How did you get into this mess?"

Scottie's fingers bit into her own arms, which were thin and brown. "How does anybody? It just happens. One day you're one person, the next you're another. Maybe it's knowing that you have to be there for someone else." Scottie turned. Her forehead was furrowed. For the first time, she looked old. Diane was reminded of those photographs from the Depression, those dust bowl women.

"Don't you have that?" Scottie said. "Didn't getting married change you?"

"Only for the better."

Scottie's eyes widened, then narrowed, and she began to smile, as if she doubted Diane's honesty.

"I was always so alone before," Diane added, feeling somehow ashamed. "Sammy's like my friend. Sometimes we don't see each other a lot, but I still know he's there." Why did her words sound false to her? She blamed it on Scottie's cynical grin.

"Maybe it's because you don't have any kids."

A door banged shut downstairs. Scottie's head tilted toward the sound, her body moved as if by its own accord.

"Thanks. I knew you'd do it." She rested her hands on her friend's shoulders, as if they were two cheerleaders discussing the pyramid act.

THE ANCIENT CONSOLE TELEVISION was tuned to the Cosby show, which shone in through airwave snow and diagonal lines. The two boys, who were ten and twelve, were wrestling each other in front of the set, giggling. Both had longish, Prince-Valiant-style brown hair that flopped into their faces. The girls sat together, their legs crossed like Indians; one of them pounded her brother with a fist, telling him to shut up.

On the sofa, Roger was pulling marijuana from a sack and putting it into plastic baggies. With the precision of a jeweler, he balanced the bags on a baby scale, adding to and taking away until he was satisfied.

After a grunted hello, Roger hadn't said a word to Diane. He was about six-foot-three, with jutting bones and bushy red hair that brushed his shoulders. His face was marked with acne pits that made him look rugged rather than ugly; Diane could see why her friend had gone for him. He seemed to be a man who knew what he was about.

Scottie sat on the other couch with Diane and worked at keeping the kids quiet. The youngest girl, about four years old, sat beside her mother, fingering the baby's toes while Scottie fed it from a bottle. For dinner, they were eating hot dogs and pork and beans on paper plates, which the kids loved and the adults chewed without comment. A floor fan rattled in front of them, barely stirring the humid air.

After the TV show was over, the kids tossed their empty plates in the trash and ran out into the yard. Scottie touched Diane's arm.

"We're gonna go outside for awhile."

Roger looked from his wife to Diane. His eyes were depthless, cloudy. "Don't let the door hit you in the ass."

In the yard, the swings were squeaking from the weight of children.

"Is he always so antagonistic?" Diane was grateful for the breeze, the clean smell of the evening air.

"Roger? He's mad at me. He didn't want you to come. He prefers I

don't see my friends." Scottie placed the baby in a portable plastic chair and strapped it in. It squirmed and smiled, watching them with round, nearly transparent blue eyes.

"Roger always wanted to be a big shot. But he didn't quite have it in him."

Diane remembered their wedding. She was in Colorado, and couldn't go, but had received an engraved invitation which indicated that it was the sort of expensive, elegant affair that Scottie had always dreamt of having. The pair had met in Carbondale, where Scottie was going to school, one of those girls majoring in marriage; she didn't even get to her sophomore year before her goal was achieved. Roger was a local boy, from one of the gritty small towns. Scottie believed that she was born to serve without complaint, not just men but everybody; it was the essence of her popularity. Only now was she looking out from the corners of her eyes, consciously hunting for trade-offs that would make her life better, trying to get something for herself because she had nothing.

"Do you like him?"

"I like the kids." Scottie fingered her hair, which looked as if it had been rapidly chopped. "Roger wasn't always so bad. We really got on at first. Or got it on." She gave Diane a sly look and laughed. "He was something. But the people here, they thought he was letting me get by with too much. Pussy-whipped, they thought. So he had to show them. The women down here think it's natural; they wouldn't feel right if they didn't have some guy slapping them around. But I can't take it. Even though we been married twelve years." She made a *huh* sound, a cut-off growl. "Time does fly."

One of the girls jumped from a moving swing, landing on her feet, then swaggered up to them, hands shoved into the pockets of her bib overalls. Blonde curls framed her face, like the Angel Gabriel's in a Renaissance painting.

"What 'cha doin'?" Lucy tucked herself under her mother's arm, looking up at Diane from under long lashes.

"Watching you." Scottie ran her hand over the fine curls that laced the child's face.

Lucy shook her head to free herself. "Wanna see my hurt?" She pulled up the leg of her denims and exposed a round blue bruise.

"Ouch," said Diane. She never knew what to say to children.

"I fell."

"I worry about the kids." Scottie pulled Lucy to her, until the girl squirmed from under her circled arms. "And I just can't seem to stop having them."

"Randy's hogging the swing, Mom."

"You just got off of it yourself."

"So?" The girl jutted out a hip. "Go yell at him."

"Go play. Now."

The girl looked up at her mother with great indignation and ran back to the swings. Diane watched her go with a certain longing. She and Sammy had decided they didn't want the responsibility of children.

"Isn't Roger going to have a fit when he finds out you sold the quilt?" Diane watched as Lucy pulled her brother off the swing.

"By the time he knows, I won't be here." Scottie managed a strained smile and leaned toward Diane, brushing against her. "It's nice of you to do this for us. You've really been a good friend."

"Won't he come after you?" Diane wondered just how mean Roger was.

"Yeah. Eventually. But my dad has a gun."

Diane backed away. But Scottie was laughing.

THEIR PLAN HAD BEEN SIMPLE: Roger usually left in the morning to do who knew what. The women would pack the stuff and the kids, squeeze all of it in around the furniture, and hit the road. In four hours, they would be back in Central Illinois, among the cornstalks and the relatives. But it was one in the afternoon, and Roger was still on the couch.

Scottie was nervous. She made a show of cleaning the house, leaving Diane alone with her husband. The TV was tuned to the afternoon soaps, which Roger appeared to know a lot about. Smoking joints, Roger told her the plots, his feet propped on the spool.

"That's Erica." He gestured toward the screen. "She's a bitch." He offered Diane a hit, which she was dying to take (she had already bought a bag from him), but she wanted to stay tense, in case something went wrong.

"Tell me about Colorado." Roger propped a foot on the couch and lifted the joint to his lips. Today he seemed relaxed and friendly; he turned out to have an appealing smile, disarming in his beaten face. "I thought about going there at one time. I'm a great rider.

"I won some prizes in rodeos. People hire me to break their horses. Been riding since I was three." He leaned toward the tray of marijuana, began rolling another expert joint. "I always wanted to be a cowboy. You ever go to any of them rodeos out there?"

"I'm not really into horses," she admitted, and Roger turned back to the television.

"I keep my horse at a friend's lot. Name's Ransom, my horse. Coal black and fast."

"Maybe you should ride professionally. Like in horse shows." Immediately Diane felt dumb; she didn't know what she was talking about.

Roger shrugged. "I'm not that fancy."

Fifteen silent minutes later, he stood and stretched, leaving the tray full of dope. He went to the door, then turned to her.

"I'll bet you wonder why I don't work."

Diane shook her head. She had assumed he made plenty of money dealing.

"There's only one job here. The mines." Roger leaned against the door frame and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. He tapped one on the back of his hand and lit it. Diane had the sense that he was posing, trying to be tough. The gesture exposed the boy in him, the boy who had worked at being important, and had failed. "When my Dad died of black lung, I quit. Sad story, huh?" He held the cigarette between the thumb and forefinger, inhaling it like a joint. "I'm not as bad as Scottie says. She's bored. There's nothing here for a person like her. This place is dead. You know?" Roger waved his hand. "Anyway. Catch you later."

Moving to the window, Diane watched the old truck pull out of the drive. Roger's elbow stuck out of the cab window, the radio blared; Diane could hear it after the truck was far down the road.

Scottie was in Lucy's room. The quilt was folded in thick quarters on the bed.

"It *is* pretty." Scottie's black hair fell forward. She pinched her hands between her knees, as if she was afraid to touch the quilt.

"You're sure you want to sell it?" It took nerve for Diane to ask; she was afraid the answer would be no. She needed that old blanket.

Scottie gave her a strange look. Diane had the feeling that she was being pitied for her ignorance.

"I need the money. How more simple can it be? Even Great-grandma Ray would have understood it." Scottie bent over and reached under the bed, pulling out a suitcase. "Got 'em all packed and ready to go." She rested the bag between her legs. "I picked up the suitcases at Sallie's—the Salvation Army. One here, one there. I been planning." Scottie walked around Lucy's room, yanking bags from under the two twin beds. There were seven battered suitcases, of varying sizes. They'd have to be squeezed into the truck somehow, along with the kids. Diane wondered if she'd have to leave something of her own behind.

"What about all this?" Diane motioned to the posters on the wall, the dolls propped on the bed pillows. All the dolls had accusatory looks, Diane thought; one of them had a finger pointed at her.

"Thought I'd get what toys I could into a garbage bag, leave the rest. Maybe Roger will be a nice guy, bring some when he visits. He

likes the kids." Scottie clapped her hands together, an organizing signal, calling the squad together.

"Let's get out of here. I told the kids to stay at Judy's down at the end of the road. I was afraid one of them might leave with Roger. Sometimes they do." Scottie's face seemed pasted together, like a paper puppet with changeable expressions, a sad mouth to a happy mouth, the eyes staying the same. She was standing, holding a suitcase, ready to leave, when she abruptly sat on the bed. She ran her finger along the rose design in the quilt.

"Remember when we were kids, and the family was so big, and people were coming over? It was just like a zoo. We were always broke, with all those junky cars in the yard. We used to play in them, remember? Race car driver?" Scottie laughed. She had forgotten that Diane wasn't her childhood friend, but an adolescent discovery. "You know, I never heard my folks argue about money. It wasn't a big deal; I never expected to have any, so I didn't think about it. So what, I had nice clothes; I had a lot of friends, a lot to do. When my kids came, I figured it would be the same for them. I didn't know the rest of the world felt different.

"Roger says I'm a kid. He's right. All I want to do is get back in with Mom and Dad. I want to live that crazy way again. I try to do that here, and hell . . . it really *is* crazy. A mess, with the kids all nervous. Roger wants more money, but he can't get it, because there's no money here to get. And he hates things sloppy, and, Diane, I am a slob.

"I don't have any friends anymore. Can you believe it? Not one real friend. The women here don't treat each other right. They get together in the kitchen and gossip and scheme about whose husband they're going to go for next, while the men smoke dope in the other room, acting like big shots. I'm an outsider here, and I always will be.

"It's a scary way to live." Scottie got up and grabbed the handles of two suitcases. She was shaking. "So let's split."

THE QUILT HAD NEVER really matched the decor of Diane's apartment. The white sparseness of the living room made it seem old and shabby. Although Sammy objected to the expense, Diane bought a new couch and armchair, patterned with minute blue flowers. She repainted the walls a pastel pink, and dreamt of putting in a fireplace, even though it was impossible. She found some homey earthenware jugs at a garage sale, and scattered them around the room as if they had some use. But it still didn't work.

The rug seemed to be the problem; the matted green shag was too modern. Diane was searching the estate sales for a piece with that geniune, country quality, but in good enough shape to be restored;

she wasn't having much luck. Her rug was in Illinois, she knew, in the home of some quaint and nearly deceased old farmwoman, a woman whose dark house had kept the colors from fading. Eventually, she would find it.

She was putting up silver tinsel when Sammy handed Diane her mail. It was a red envelope without a return address, sealed with Scotch tape.

She opened it to find a Christmas card with a cheeky Santa holding a pipe. Smoke curled around his head.

Inside was a picture of Scottie and her family. The baby was on its feet now; Scottie was holding it up by the arms. Roger looked like he had put on a few pounds, and he now had an attractive droopy mustache. All of them were smiling.

"Isn't that the same card she sent last year?" Sammy asked.

Sentimental Lately

MARTHA MICHAEL

The bitterness lately has given you a craving for sweets,
so you sugar coat your snorer
into an angel-faced boy sleeper,
(who diagnoses his disturbance as a deviated septum),
and smile because he signed himself
"Truely," with an "e."

That extra vowel's as close
to a commitment as he gets,
but maybe his new night forays
will turn out to be sleepwalks.
You may find him truer in his awkwardness
than the perfect faces in your dreams,
who turn to strangers with the dawn.

You, who love them, understand the weaknesses
of words (even spelled correctly),
how your curses for his reasons
still leave you sentimental:
histology has taught him
the enduring strength of tissue.
The old pull of blood still tells,
whispering truely of its origin from the heart.

Paper Boys

STEVE KETZER, Jr.

It is 5 a.m.;
most are not yet teenagers.
They huddle in middle class garages
beneath sixty watts worth of enlightenment
folding papers and popping rubber bands
to the tune of The American Dream.

Their parents smile as they chase
that radio, bike, or baseball glove,
that ounce of old Columbian Gold,
and rock, rock, rock and roll.

They make more money than a Jat with six kids
whose wife prepares dinner over cow dung,
the family fortune on her nose,
three worlds and hunger away.

Paper boys pedal through rain grey mornings
flinging papers like hand grenades.

Castaways

GERALD J. JOHNSON

I dreamt of the sea last night,
Not the ocean of the summer beaches,
A warm, bright toy for the city folk,

But the dark sea of the deeps,
Cold, devouring,
Elemental.

Adrift on it, we thought
To cling together for warmth
But sank each time we tried.

Forced apart to stay afloat,
We drifted on, seeking the courage
To drown together.

Stilwell House

PAULA V. SMITH

THE RAIN IS OVER and in the new silence, in the occasional wet sounds from the eaves, Nina arranges the knicknacks on her dresser: the seashell and the roll of postage stamps, the sample-size cologne bottles and the carved wooden bird.

"Sometimes it's easier to love a place than to love the people in it," her father had said the day after Nina graduated from high school. The Enderbys were packing the van for their trip North, where they would spend the summer. Seymour had often told his children the stories of this place, their ancestral home: he showed them a grey photograph of the facade in a book of historical landmarks, and they each spelled out "Stilwell House, 1674" with a sense of looking toward it through a wavy pressed-glass window from another world. Or at least another country: Stilwell House was in Nova Scotia; Seymour had spent summers there with his grandmother "when I was your age."

"My age or Nina's age?" Maddy would persist, narrowing her eyes and lifting her chin to compete with her older sister.

"Both," Seymour Enderby told his daughters. So neither one was entirely satisfied.

Now, with the summer almost over, Nina remembers those words about loving a place more than the people. Her bedroom window—in the wrangle over bedrooms, Nina was awarded the smaller but more romantic corner room—faces Stilwell Park, once the ancestral land but now divided from their garden by a rural road, a public park with its own swath of coastline for bathing and bonfires. Nina has rambled that coast for nearly three months, as summer fog dims the outlines of rock and water, but the place still does not fold up and live inside her as her other worlds have. Since before Nina was born, the Enderbys have moved to a new place every two or three years. To be foreign in each place has become the same as being native. Perhaps because this is supposed to be "their" place, finally, it eludes their foreignness, and Stilwell House at the end of Nina's seventeenth year does not seem to belong to her. She continues to move the knicknacks, her head bent over them as though she is playing a complicated board game, as though the right placement of all the elements will add up to some-

thing more than what is already there.

A small sound, the clink of china plates being taken out of a cupboard, brings alive for Nina the whole scene downstairs: Maddy, standing barefoot in the kitchen, wearing a roomy Foothill College sweatshirt and a pair of old jeans, takes charge of making omelets for her father and siblings; with the sternness of her fifteen years she commands their younger brother Hampton to set the table for dinner, and having covered the cast iron skillet—the omelets gold and steaming inside—she marches out to tell their father, who is replastering the ceiling in the front parlor, that he should wash up before the meal.

Nina sets down the square-topped cologne bottle, a gift from their last flight on TWA, and prepares to go downstairs, but there is some new activity across the road: a trailer has tried to set up camp in the park and a Canadian policeman (Seymour calls them "mounties") has pulled in to inform the travelers that Stilwell Park is not a camping ground.

Nina can't see the people very clearly; at this point Maddy is calling loudly, and she goes to join the rest of the Enderbys downstairs. The wall along the staircase is only partly covered with wallpaper, one of many unfinished tasks. Seymour plans to hang photographs of last-century Stilwells along this wall, in ornate frames that emphasize the young-looking faces of the ancestors: men in hats with bent brims and women in long dresses of white lace.

When they arrived at the end of spring, no one had lived in Stilwell House for years. With the windows unboarded and the doors unlocked, the grey woodframe house has become a center of attention for children from the village, some perhaps distant cousins of the Enderbys. The children ride their bicycles up and down the gravel driveway, or walk up behind the house when the family is stacking firewood or working on the boat in the backyard. Seymour speaks in a friendly, distant way to all of them, not trying to remember their names or which ones have a place on the Stilwell family tree. The Americanized branch of the family has done better than their northern relatives, a fact which no one mentions but everyone acknowledges. A subgroup of the villagers, all teenage boys, seems more interested in teasing his daughters than in the history of the house itself. Seymour appreciates the natural and inevitable pattern of this interest; at the same time he watches over its progress as though he were not sure whether to interfere.

From the yard the boys look through the screen door and whistle. Maddy goes on serving omelets and yells to Hampton that he should be pouring milk now, the omelets are getting cold and they had better not blame her.

"Okay, okay, don't have a spaz," says Hampton, standing on a

kitchen chair to get out the glasses. He pours milk carefully into three glasses lined up the counter.

Seymour comes in, remarks on the delicious smell of the dinner and calls his younger daughter a world-class chef. Then, to the boys outside, leaning against the tree and the picnic table, "You all go home for a while now. We're having a little dinner here. But do feel free to come back in about half an hour." Slowly they stand, push bikes down the driveway, scuffle gravel with worn shoes.

"You don't have to invite them back, Dad," says Nina from the dining room as she watches their exodus down the road.

"I was giving myself the liberty of a little sarcasm," Seymour replies. "After all I'm not the major attraction here. But you're probably right; it was wasted on my audience." In a good humor he begins to carry dishes to the table.

"Thanks for your stupendous help," Maddy says to Nina as she applies butter to a burn on her finger.

"Any time," Nina replies.

"I can't believe you! You are so spoiled."

"Could we have a little salt out here?" Seymour is asking.

"You get it, Hampton," Maddy tells their brother.

"There's a sunset," says Nina as she sits down, so Hampton, salt cellar in hand, has to go and look for it.

"What sunset, all I see is clouds."

"You're not looking the right way," Seymour tells him. The campers Nina saw earlier, a family from New Jersey, knock on the front door just as the Enderbys start eating; they ask if they can camp in back of Stilwell House for the night. Seymour gives them permission. As soon as the campers leave, Maddy and Hampton begin to plan their spying mission to take place later in the evening.

After dinner Seymour and Nina drink tea. They have decided not to light a fire because the weather is too warm, and they leave the front door open to the last light and the fog coming in from the shore.

"I'm sure not doing the dishes," says Maddy.

"No one says you have to," says Nina. Seymour spreads papers and books on the dining room table once it has been cleared. Nina turns on the hot water for the dishes.

"Dad, why can't I go fishing?" Maddy asks for the second time since dinner.

"You can. Just get someone to go with you."

"Nina and Hampton are lazy bums."

"Stop bothering Dad," says Nina from the kitchen, knocking plates gently against each other in soapy water.

"Stay out of this," says Maddy. "Daaa-aad . . . ?"

"If we're so lazy how come we're doing the dishes?" asks Hampton, waving a dish towel.

"Hampton, I think I asked you this morning to bring in the fishing rods and the tools. Just before dinner I saw they were still in the yard."

"But Hampton is helping me. . . " Nina begins. By now her brother has dropped the towel on the counter and rushed out into the misty half light. Nina says something else but the water faucet is on. Maddy laughs.

Nina drinks some more tea; she holds one of Grandmother Alicia Stilwell's china cups between hands that are still covered with soapsuds. Maddy listens to the radio upstairs, apparently no longer interested in plotting against the tourists. She tunes her radio to a pop station that plays American songs from several years ago. Papers rustle and Seymour sets his cup down on its saucer. Nina dries her hands and goes into the dining room.

"More tea, Dad?"

"No, thank you."

In his father's workroom, Hampton drops a handful of nails into a drawer. Like most rooms in Stilwell House, the workroom is lighted by one unshaded bulb that hangs from the ceiling. There is a lot of rewiring left to do; Seymour was working on the wiring in the parlor earlier today, making a series of holes in the ceiling which then needed replastering. The workroom is full of pieces of wood and metal which Seymour doesn't like to throw away. When the room gets too full to move around in, the Enderbys cart wheelbarrow-loads of junk out to the unused barn. It will be years before the barn is full.

Hampton finds a tennis ball covered with sawdust in one corner of the workroom. He bounces it experimentally several times, catching it in small calloused hands, then walks back into the house with it.

"Did you turn off the light in the workroom?" Nina says to him on her way upstairs. Hampton looks closely at the dirty seams and woolly surface of the ball, then tosses it into a back corner of the broom closet under the stairs. He goes back to turn off the light.

Holding up the window sash with her other hand, Maddy fits the mosquito screen into the frame. Her room, with two more windows than Nina's, still holds the smell of wallpaper glue from their work earlier in the week: the shallow tubs of water, rolls of paper (gluey scraps sticking to the floorboards), scissors, the stepladder, the musty smell all around them. Nina had spent a whole day and part of the next helping—which was nice, Maddy knew, though it had been raining and there hadn't been much else to do. Maddy spins the knobs on her battered black radio, thinking of her father's litany, "no poison oak, no poison ivy, no poisonous snakes," as he led them through the woods after the rain for blueberry picking. The clover around the berry plants was still wet but the berries were promising: small and dense as bullets, midnight blue. A cluster of them could fill your hand.

The way to gather them was to flick away the green and white berries, tug at the dry twigs, and hear the sound of berries sprinkling into a tin bucket. With enough for two pies and a batch of Seymour's specialty, scones, the Enderbys went back to their van. That had been a good day.

Hearing the sound of violins, Maddy twists the radio knob again; classical belongs to Nina. Since there are no curtains in her room yet, she takes her nightgown downstairs to change in the bathroom. By now it has turned dark and she closes the heavy front door, which someone left open, before she turns the corner and goes down the hall.

An hour ago Nina yelled, "turn it down, Maddy!" across the third floor, and the rock music swelled defiantly before subsiding to its original volume. But now the radio has been turned off for a while. As she brushes her hair before the mirror, a moth stumbles against her elbow and moves away. Another, larger moth crawls up the newly painted closet door. Once Nina turns off her lamp, the moths might go: out the window toward lakes and fishing boats in the darkness, through the green of night forests—or deeper into the labyrinth of Stilwell rooms: some newly papered and smelling of glue, others half done, still more with ancient wallpaper that peels to show centuries of cracked plaster.

FROM UNDER HER MATTRESS Nina takes a notebook and consults, once again, the Kevin problem: something the rest of her family does not share. Early in the summer, when the Enderbys had just arrived, the children took a picnic lunch over to the beach. They crossed the road to Stilwell Park, carrying their two inflatable rafts, their jug of lemonade, their bag of sandwiches, and sandals for walking across the rocks. Since it was low tide, their father told them, they would find a sandy place to spread out their towels.

Hampton immediately floated out into the bay on his raft. As Maddy and Nina sunbathed on their towels, the group of local boys established itself on large rocks some distance down the beach. A few of them collected flat stones to skip across the water; others lit cigarettes, holding them low in case their parents could see them. But the beach was empty except for the boys and the Enderbys. Hampton's raft floated farther from shore.

"Hey! Is it cold?" Maddy yelled suddenly, sitting up on her towel. Hampton extended one hand, thumb up.

"Warm!" he yelled back. Maddy stood up.

"I'm going in," she announced. There was a whistle from the rocks.

"I don't want to stay here alone," said Nina without looking up

from her paperback.

"Come with me then," said Maddy impatiently, waving at Hampton to come closer. Through a haze, they could see the hills on the other side of the bay. Most of the boys had stripped down to bathing suits or underwear and were wading into the water at the end of the beach. Maddy stepped across the rocks delicately to the water's edge.

There was just one boy sitting on the rocks now. Nina glanced at him. He looked thirteen or fourteen years old; wore a faded olive green T-shirt and jeans; his brown hair had grown a little too long. Nina looked back down at her book, hearing a few more low whistles as Maddy splashed out to the raft.

The rest of the boys were tossing someone's sneaker back and forth in the shallow water. One of them threw it to Maddy. She didn't hesitate, but fired it back into the wet-haired screaming group. Hampton fell off the raft—he had been standing on it—and someone helped him recover it. He lent out the raft to another boy, and they began to learn each other's names and splash more water around. Nina set aside her book and put her head down on the towel, tired of squinting into the sunlight. She listened to the waves crashing on the rocks between their screams.

Later that day Seymour Enderby drove the van up alongside Stilwell House. A couple more wagonloads of beach gravel would be needed for the driveway before it rained again. He carried bags of groceries into the house and began to put jars and boxes away in the cupboards as his children approached the house, wet-haired from the beach: his daughters, four of the local boys, and Hampton trailing behind with the two inflatable rafts. One of the boys walked into the kitchen and set the lemonade jug on the counter, nodding a greeting to Seymour.

"If you wait a second I'll help you, Dad," said Nina. She got a bowl from the cupboard and took up the bag of unshelled green peas.

"Maddy's got some new friends," she told her father. "So I see," he answered. There was laughter in the yard. Nina carried the bowl and the bag of peas out to the picnic table; she began shelling them, leaving the fresh green pods in a heap on the bag. The boys tossed Hampton's football, examined the paint job on Seymour's boat, climbed the tree. The pile of empty pods grew on the table; Maddy reached out to help with them.

"You can do some too, Kevin," Maddy said to the boy in the olive shirt; he had swung himself up into the tree and was looking down at them.

"Women's work," said Kevin and he laughed, an unexpectedly sweet ringing laugh. Nina looked over at Maddy, but she was bent over the task, wet hair over her forehead, ankles crossed under the

bench, suntanned hands reaching for a handful of pods.

"What do you think is men's work?" asked Nina, looking up into the leafy branches where Kevin was sitting.

"Fishing. Clam shucking. Fixing cars."

"Have you got a car?"

"Nah. Someday I will. Something fast; a race car."

"You need money for a racing car," said Hampton, coming up behind them.

"I know it," said Kevin, unperturbed.

"Have you ever had a job?" asked Maddy.

" 'Course I have. Shucking clams up in Digby, when my dad'll take me up there. Made forty dollars in a day one time." He looked around at the Enderbys. "But I can't work in the plant like some guys, 'cos my back."

"What's wrong with it?" asked Nina.

"Fell out of a tree!" His eyes widened, another smile starting. "That was two years ago."

"Did you see a doctor?"

"Nah. I never gone to the doctor."

"Never in your whole life?" This was Hampton.

"Nah. Not even when I got this. Kevin showed them a long white scar above his ankle. "See? Got it splitting wood one time." He jumped out of the tree. "I guess I'll live when I live. You got to die sometime. Hey, throw me that ball."

Kevin and Hampton stepped back behind the table. Nina got up to carry the bag of peas back into the kitchen and Maddy brushed the pods into the empty bag. As she followed Nina into the house, one of the boys whistled at her from the end of the yard, but without the former enthusiasm, and the door swung slowly shut.

As the summer went on some of the boys got jobs at the fish-processing plant, or at a nearby farm, but Kevin continued to visit Stilwell House almost every day. He wrote about the Enderbys to a cousin who had moved to another province; Nina, looking over his letter, corrected for him the spelling of their names. On the beach in Stilwell Park, having ridden his bicycle along the edge between sand and water while supplying all the sound effects of a motorcycle, Kevin lit a cigarette and Nina asked him when he had started smoking.

"When I was five. Not really till I was seven."

"Is that when everybody starts?"

"You bet; out in the woods. Get in big trouble for it if you're caught."

"What do you want to do when you grow up?" Nina asked.

"I'd like to be a cop, maybe," said Kevin, letting his bike topple in the sand and coming to sit with her. "Only thing is, it doesn't give you

much time for your woman—" he corrected himself, looking at her, "for your wife."

"Is there a police academy around here?"

"Up in Digby. They'd send me to some other place, though; they won't let you be a cop around here 'cos you know the people."

"Why do you want to be a cop?"

"You know; you get to drive fast, arrest a lot of guys . . . I just think I'd like it."

Kevin took Nina to visit his grandmother's place, across from the village grocer's. Since he knew everyone, Kevin waved at all the cars passing them on the road: a curt wave like a military salute. He called out a greeting to the gas station attendants.

The trailer sat back from the road, paint peeling on a makeshift porch that in the middle of summer was still threaded with Christmas light bulbs. Nina and Kevin found a cat collar in the yard outside the trailer, and Kevin picked it up to take inside.

His grandmother looked unexpectedly young, in a housedress and sandals, not even a wrinkle on her face or hands. Giving her the stray collar Kevin asked, "when do you want the grass mowed?" and she said to him, "whenever you can." She took the cat collar and moved toward the kitchen, past the neatly dusted television set with its vase of plastic flowers. Kevin had introduced them: "This is Nina. She's staying up at Stilwell." It was strange how everyone knew Stilwell House, and nodded, understanding Nina's place in their world.

Meanwhile Maddy and Hampton made other friends, and some of the older ones, their particular friends Chris and Sally, told Maddy about a social event that couldn't be missed: Friday night dances at the Barn in Lawton. For the rest of the summer the Enderbys asked their father to take them to a Barn dance, but each week there was a problem: the fog made driving unsafe, Seymour was tired from blazing a firewood trail, the dance was cancelled because of broken sound equipment, their new friends couldn't afford the entrance fee that weekend. The Enderbys didn't get to a Barn dance until just a few days before they packed up their van to drive back to the States.

As the last week of their summer begins, Nina goes over the list of "what's left" as if working through a relentless countdown to the time when they will leave: the week will be spent, hour by hour, in planting parsley, gathering firewood, washing the interior of the van with pungent ammonia-water, buying eggs at the Clarendons' farm down the road, building a night-time bonfire on the beach and describing glowing red arcs with the end of a burning stick, going down the next day at low tide to dig in the salty mud among clumps of yellow rockweed for clams (which Kevin refuses to do with them, because for him

it's work, not recreation), washing the last batch of sheets and towels and leaving them in the old linen chest, making sure the Enderbys have left none of their own belongings in the rooms of the old house.

On Friday they scrape off old wallpaper in the parlor, finding in some places seven or eight different colors and patterns: pale green with thin white stripes, gold flowers, aquamarine. By the time dinner is over and they are supposed to be driving south twenty five miles to the Barn, the pump has broken during her shower and Maddy has to go across the road with her soapy hair wrapped in a towel, to rinse (with Nina's help) under a faucet in Stilwell Park.

MADDY AND NINA ARE SURE they will be late, and Seymour obligingly stops the van outside Kevin's grandmother's trailer just long enough for Kevin, his shirt still unbuttoned and a pair of shoes under his arm, to come rattling down the steps of the porch and join them for the journey.

"New shoes?" asks Seymour, seeing the clean soles.

"Not really—they're going to be my school shoes," says Kevin, not meeting anyone's eyes. "I'm not sposed to wear them before September." This confession over, he looks around at the Enderbys to let them in on a secret. "They don't like me going out, 'cos this one night I came in at two—but he can't go telling me what to do, he's not my real father anyway."

"So you didn't tell them you were going out," says Maddy knowingly, and Nina glares at her.

"They know I'm out 'cos they know I'm not there," says Kevin, and he looks out the window, subject closed.

"You ought to roll up your sleeves, Kevin, to look really sharp," Nina tells him, turning down his shirt collar in the back. "Let me show you how."

In the parking lot of the Barn, where large old cars and pickup trucks are gathering, Seymour leaves them and they start looking for Sally and Chris. The Barn is filled with teenagers, dim lights, and cigarette smoke; the band plays loud American music through an inferior sound system. Kevin refuses to dance for a long time and when Nina finally dances with him she feels disappointed that it's not more romantic.

They go outside into the parking lot for some cool air, and Kevin lights up a cigarette, cupping it in his palm, in the half-concealed way that he must have developed over years of forbidden smoking.

"You know that's bad for you. I've heard you coughing," says Nina before she can stop herself.

"You got to die sometime," says Kevin, exhaling. "Why not this way?"

"You're a cynic. You know what that is?"

"No."

"Someone who doesn't believe anything—who doesn't trust anyone."

"I trust m'self," says Kevin promptly.

"That's something, I guess."

"I trust you, too."

"You damn well better," says Nina, looking away from him. The night fog is turning into a light rain, scattered into distinct drops by the parking lot lamps.

"Anyway I won't last long once I get a car. Maybe six months." He grins at her.

"Let's go back in. Isn't there someone else you want to dance with?"

Kevin dances with Maddy and also asks a ninth-grade girl named Colleen, who wears a mask of lipstick and eye shadow, but she refuses.

"Colleen sure was anxious to dance with you," says Nina afterward.

"Her pa don't like me," says Kevin, but he doesn't know why, or won't tell.

The dance breaks up early because of a fight starting at the end of the Barn where the band was playing. Everyone is curious to see the fight, but they are herded outside instead, and Maddy calls Seymour from a telephone booth in the town. It is only about ten o'clock. Kevin lights another cigarette, puts his arm around Maddy's shoulders; she moves away, making a face at him. A few minutes later he puts his arm around Nina's shoulders and she lets him, standing that way until the see the van pull around the corner and swing its headlights down their block.

Sitting in the back seat, Nina doesn't see where they are going. She will write in her secret notebook tonight that the point of the Kevin problem is that it has no solution; writing shouldn't be a sermon or a neatly packaged conclusion, anyway; you do it because you have to. She is not really holding hands with Kevin because he is too young for her and they live in different dimensions. "I am haunted by a fourteen year old ghost," she will write and cross out. "Half of what bothers me is that this won't last. When it fades I should be even more heartbroken but I won't be." Then she will try, "This is what you learn when you leave, taking the place but not the people with you, folding

up this world and storing it with all your others."

What she finally will not cross out is the story of what they saw when they left Kevin at his grandmother's place that night. As the van pulled out into the road to make its way up to the dark shape of Stilwell House, the porch of the trailer flashed suddenly a fanfare of brilliant colors: red, green, blue and gold. Through the darkness Nina couldn't see the plastic flamingos or the broken down bicycle, only this absurd and unexpected send-off, a Christmas celebration in mid-August. From his corner of the porch Kevin kept the lights flashing on and off for them until the van had turned the corner and climbed the hill.

Stations

KAREN BENNETT

In the train's window I see my own reflection
and the passing towns: the highways running
across my cheekbones, billboards and houses
in my face, the occasional sky in my hair.
And the fine nature of my constraints becomes evident.

I took a picture of you once, sitting
in front of a low tree, and could not decide later
which was the more incidental—the green leaves
falling across your shoulders and into a patch
of soil, or you in your diminution,
without the intricacies of thought.

When I look back into the window, I see myself
fixed within a great movement. There is a rush
of wind outside which I know without feeling.
There are the homes interrupting the darkness
and the understood families within them.
I am sure that a thief is in one of the shops,
stealing something that he will not sell,
but regard with a pure and obsessive delight.

I think of you always in this gratuitous way,
as small as the jewel at the end of the crime,
and as enormous. I think of you limb for limb
as it were, in an isolation both grave and laughable.
And the abstraction astounds me, like the sight
of my face in the glass: a temporal etching,
a weird conclusion arising out of the blur,
like the naive sense of importance
with which we pursue our lives.

AUTHOR INDEX TO VOLUMES 30-34

(Index, Volumes 1-20, at end of Volume 20)
(Index, Volumes 21-25, at end of Volume 25)
(Index, Volumes 26-29, at end of Volume 29)

POEMS

FICTION

NON-FICTION

PLAY

Contributors

Director of Development Communications at Rider College, EMILIE BABCOX has published a number of poems and translations. KAREN BENNETT, a frequent contributor and alumna, is currently reporting for two Philadelphia area magazines. BECKY BRADWAY has a long list of fiction publications, including a Pushcart Prize nominee this year. She lives in Springfield, Illinois and works as Communications Director at United Way and as a grantwriter for Goodwill Industries. JIM CORY is a poet who lives in Philadelphia. He is currently working on a series of essays about key figures in American cultural history, of whom Bessie Smith is the latest subject. Our veteran contributor J.B. GOODENOUGH is finding a home for her second volume. Having published over 500 poems since 1979 (yes, 500), she was recently featured, with an interview in JAM TO-DAY. KAREN GREEN, a Wordsworth editor and poet, has a Ph.D. from London University and now lives adjacent to Hampstead Heath. GERALD J. JOHNSON is Director of Special Programs at La Salle University and a chess enthusiast as well as a poet. After some peripatetic years cleaning grain barges on the Mississippi and spraypainting yachts in San Diego, STEVE KETZER, Jr. has settled down to work as an aircraft inspector in the Hot Springs, Arkansas airport. He also publishes poems around the country. Another La Salle alumna, MARTHA MICHAEL is pursuing her M.A. at the University of Delaware. "Sounds of the Rude World" is JEANNE SCHINTO's second story with us. She has published in many journals and newspapers, and her story "Caddie's Day" appeared in *Best American Short Stories, 1984*. PAULA V. SMITH grew up all over the world as the daughter of Foreign Service parents. She's published widely and received a number of awards for her stories and poetry. She is currently completing a thesis of short stories toward the M.F.A. at Cornell.

We are pleased to announce, however belatedly, that our colleague CLAUDE KOCH's story "Bread and Butter Questions," which appeared here in Autumn 1983, was selected for an O. Henry Award, and appears in the *O. Henry Prize Stories 1985*, ed. William Abrahams (Doubleday, 1985).

Editor: John Christopher Kleis
Poetry Editor: Richard Lautz
Editorial Assistance: John J. Keenan

Four Quarters

(ISSN-0015-9107)
LA SALLE UNIVERSITY
Phila., Pa. 19141-1199

Second Class
Postage Paid
at Phila., Pa.